

In Remembrance

BY HUGH MALCOLM MCCORMICK



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“Though awful tempests thunder overhead,
I deem that God is not disquieted,
The faith that trembles somewhat, yet is sure,
Through storm and darkness of a way secure.”

—James Whitcomb Riley.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN—Father Abraham! Fifty-one years ago you left us, yet to-day, a Nation's eyes grow softened at your name.

O great and good and faithful unto death; O simple, deep and wise; O martyred savior of a stricken Land—from what high throne do you behold your Country day by day!

There fell a gloom upon the Sacred Hills, Heaven hid its face and Earth travailed beneath the Centurion's foot, while the Lord Christ hung upon the Cross—and, when you passed to God for your reward, there fell upon our Land from sea to sea a darkness, while your orphaned People sobbed.

O cherished lingerers of the Gray and Blue, O fellow-countrymen of North and South, pause—and in that deep-seamed face behold the woes of millions of mankind, the burdens of a people nigh to death, the sufferings of a hundred battlefields, the countless tears of widows and of maids, and stricken Motherhood and Fatherhood and piteous, pitiless DUTY written large.

Abraham Lincoln—Father Abraham, generous, merciful and just—our memories are still so fond and tender they can stir to anguish, and, at the quick pang, start the tears again. Ah, God, will nothing do but suffering, is there no other road than that of grief, must sorrow haunt forever the footsteps of the Race—eternal brother of the sad ghost, loss? O grave and kind evangel of a bitter day—I do not come with fulsome praise, nor to recall the blood-bathed time in which you lived, nor yet compare the present with the past; I come with tear-dimmed eyes and fluttering pulse and choking breath to falter, “we remember.” Is my message plain, or do my trembling lips deny their office? That we remember, remember the war-racked days and care-filled nights when you with God's help saved “Our Country” from disunion. Patient, self-forgetful, uncomplaining, honest “Abe”—we've not forgotten! No other name your People honor is embalmed within our Nationheart in such a wealth of tenderness and love; no other face of all the Great and Good of Earth we look upon with such high reverence, homage and esteem.

Large-hearted Lover of your Kind, let me speak! Too seldom far is just praise given, too often far the slanderous tongues of envy and of hate shrivel and scar the Martyrs of Mankind; therefore let me speak, I do but voice my Fellows' minds, we will be eased and you assured if I speak on.

From wakening springtime cornfields and grass-edged village streets my Fellows come, from humming mill and murmuring wood, from tall, gaunt buildings in the marts of trade, from mountain, valley, river, plain and sea—to do you homage, “Abe.” You know us—great, kind-eyed Chieftain—and our hearts are filled with blessings and our souls are warm “Abe,” warm with the memories of a Country saved, sweet with the knowledge of an honest Man, touched with a hint of that spirit which in a fuller sphere shall make misunderstandings fade forever in the sun of love. We see, behind the tender April sunshine, the pallid hosts of those who fought with you, and—mingling with them freely—see we too the thin, worn ranks of Grey. There is no North or South in Heaven and, here too, Pity remembers now both Sides were sorely scarred, and common sorrow makes us brothers all. From your high place among the Good and Great you’ve seen the South and North united since against a common foe, and new wounds, got together, wash away all save the sigh that Brothers ever warred.

When, round our hearths as gathering shadows deepen, at eve we speak of you, and stories of your kindness and your faith are told again; a thousand thousand new resolves to meet the future rightly and to merit well of it through courage, diligence and charity, assuredly will form—for the Human Soul is the Chief Thing, noble Lincoln, and for that you set a standard beyond all gauge of value while Mankind endures.

We called you plain and common while you lived—we Common People whom you loved so well—and you *were* common, plain and unaffected, sincere and loyal and full of large compassion; firm in all duty, strong in time of trouble, and generous in victory and full of noble charity for friend and foe alike. O mind and soul and heart superlative, O wise and pure and great and good, O gentle, grieving, sweet and loving Father, Counsellor and Friend—words fail me and I bow impotent—little, pitiful and poor beside your towering worthiness, your wisdom and your strength.

Kissed on brow and lips with a celestial glory, like Israel’s Moses of old we see you stand—God-given, God-recalled—the princeliest Commoner, the tenderest possession, the dearest name we own. Dear “Old Abe”—reach out your hands to us and bless us and tell us to be of cheer; help us follow that path you found led straight to God—and, before His throne, we pray you intercede for our follies and mercifully plead for our shortcomings—for we are your People, and, sometimes, the lights are dim below.

Yes, you belong to us and we to you, and upborne by the lesson of your life we turn away to meet our smaller duties, simpler tasks, remembering—“to each according to his strength, and by the light which each is given, let everyone perform his honest duty.”

Even so, Father Abraham. Amen.

